

HAZMAT Challenge gives regional emergency responders safe, realistic experience

September 1, 2013



A semi-truck, railroad car and motor vehicle accident were some of the “props” recently used as part of the Lab’s 17th Annual Hazardous Materials (HAZMAT) Challenge.

This year, 14 teams from New Mexico, Oklahoma and even Missouri competed in the challenge designed to test their ability to complete simulated emergency tasks as rapidly as possible. Teams were not only judged on the techniques used to mitigate hazards but could lose points if safety procedures were not properly followed.

Situations confronted by teams included radiological and chemical hazards including a clandestine lab, contaminated bodies, a leaking rail car and a confined space filled with artificial smoke.

The training event held at Los Alamos National Laboratory each year gives emergency response teams from across the Southwest an opportunity to network, share lessons

learned and gain credentials for annual certification. A safe, hands-on learning environment is critical to the participants advancing their skills.

The Edmond Oklahoma and Santa Fe fire departments were awarded first and second place in overall performance, respectively, and the Las Cruces and Los Alamos fire departments tied for third place. In technical events, the fire departments from Las Cruces, Edmond, Oklahoma and Sandia National Laboratories were first, second and third place. The Sportsmanship Award went to Clovis Fire Department.

“Not only do the teams have an opportunity to try different approaches to problem solving” Emergency Operations Group Leader Jeff Dare said “but the relationships built during the week could become important should a large problem require responders from multiple agencies. The participants would already have experience working with each other that could be very beneficial during a HAZMAT response.”

The Laboratory funds the event and its Emergency Response Group plans and coordinates the event overall. The NM Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management provided funding for the in state team’s travel expenses this year.

Employees from multiple LANL organizations as well as State and National organizations assist with the execution of the challenge each year.

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